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ABSTRACT

The accepted assumption among researchers is that control has trait-like features; under controlled conditions, individuals experience a sense of control by interacting with the environment, experiencing personal influence and evaluating perceived outcomes (Rotter, 1966 and Bandura, 1974). It seems reasonable, therefore, to examine the sense of control during economic transitions within a community and to evaluate this perspective. In this study data were gathered from a Northwest community which displayed high levels of unemployment, substantial plant closure, cutbacks, layoffs, and limited population movement. Data from 137 couples were used to introduce questions regarding the trait-like portrayal of locus of control. The sample was divided according to income reduction and gender. Husbands were selected because of the long tradition of the breadwinner role in the local area and its emphasis in the literature reviewed. The underemployed group was composed of those men who had experienced an income reduction of 30% or more. Pearson Correlations indicated that marital characteristics were associated with external control orientations but not internality. Findings suggest that control may be experienced in diverse ways; therefore, the single continuum construct may be a limited perspective. This study portrays financial loss as a marital problem in establishing desired degree(s) of control. The resource development approach appeared to address only part of the problem. It emphasized individual development while neglecting marital decision making. (Author/ABL)

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*Male Lifestyle and Locus of Control: Considerations for Underemployment, Career Development and Community Policy

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ABSTRACT

Data from a Northwest sample of married men was used to introduce questions regarding the trait-like portrayal of locus of control. Pearson Correlations indicated marital characteristics were associated with external control orientations but not internality. Further, findings suggest contol may be experienced in diverse ways. Therefore, the single contiuum construct may be a limited perspective. Suggestions for community response, marital counseling strategies and career development considerations are provided.

Key Words: Locus of control, underemployment, career development, marital counseling, public policy.

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Male Lifestyle and Locus of Control: Considerations for Underemployment, Career Development and Community Policy

People seem to regard the sense of control in a positive way, and are likely to respond favorably when it is experienced, particularly when challenged by the environment. Perhaps, the repeated exposure to this feeling develops into a personal characteristic. Certainly, the accepted assumption among researchers was that control had trait-like features (Rotter, 1966). Under controlled conditions, individuals experienced a sense of control by interacting with the environment, experiencing personal influence, and evaluating perceived outcomes (Bandura, 1974). It seems reasonable, then, to examine the sense of control during economic transitions within a community, and evaluate this perspective.

A number of life events (Wong & Sproule, 1984) and relationships (Cobb, 1982) recently developed importance in conceptualizing the sense of control. It became possible, then, to view the sense of control as continuous. As such, it has potential as an indicator for the quality of adjustment strategies to stressful circumstances. For example, some research and theory portrayed locus of control as influenced by people in much the way it was affected by external events (Levenson, 1973). However, while relational interactions and personal perceptions are implicated as promising areas for investigation, they were rarely exposed to research efforts (Lefcourt, 1984). For instance, those without control

deteriorated in mood (Leff & Haft, 1983), experienced frustration and depression (Eisenberg & Lazarsfeld, 1938), and learned helplessness (Abramson, Seligman & Teasdale, 1978). Such findings invited the inference the sense of control had a variety of behavioral, cognitive, and/or emotional expressions and patterns which influenced specific lifestyle decisions. There were likely a number of mitigating phenomena which intervened, then, in personal efforts to establish a sense of control, and influence well-being (Renshaw, 1976).

One research effort in this promising area found internals more likely than externals to be active, and this difference was influenced by people they viewed as powerful (Levenson, 1973). Research in this regard highlighted marital functioning. For example, a standard assumption regarding married men with a sense of control was their ability to balance their work and family role performances (Portner, 1983), and they more routinely made employment transitions (Moen, Kain & Elder, 1983). Those without the sense of control were more likely to experience additional stress from job loss (Kanter, 1977), and conveyed this burden into the marital relationship. For instance, couples exchanged blame for personal misfortune during hard times (Zvonkovic, 1988), while appearing to desire control. It seems likely these couples may overlook expressions of, and/or deny features of control while focusing on their relationships.

Marriage can more likely provide an arena for control when it is a mutual experience. A heightened sense of control, was noted among couples who coped successfully with stress (McCubbin & Patterson, 1982). While arguing for the importance of a perceived sense of control, one group of researchers made a case for its contextual refinement (Gross, Tiffany, Tiffany & Jackson, 1988). Therefore, the level of security, including the sense of control, experienced in a marriage has implications for personal perception. The marital system, then, provides an environment in which perception may be processed, shaped, and/or differentiated. While strategies and perceptions are exchanged between spouses, the sense of control may provide a barometer for the effectiveness of lifestyle strategies. This is more likely the case if experiences are shared, disclosure seems personal, communication is routine, and partners trust the information received. The point is, control or the lack of it, seems fundamental to a variety of marital interactions.

Flexibility in accomplishing marital tasks was viewed as facilitating adjustment to financial downturns (Moen, 1982; Rodman & Safillios-Rothschild, 1984; Voydanoff, 1983). However, traditional approaches to problem-solving had a remarkable tenacity during employment change (Dalia & Guest, 1975), and working couples more readily relied on traditional role allocations (Kanter, 1977). Under these circumstances, decisions are likely pre-determined and require less couple

interaction. This marital style is more likely effective when events within and outside the marriage are stable and predictable. This, currently, is not the case for many families. In marriages where couples make assumptions rather than decisions, their sense of control is likely diminished.

There is a need, then, to measure locus of control among a variety of domains (Wong & Sproule, 1984), especially within the marital relationship, and in realistic designs (Lefcourt, 1984). This is important for the construct to evolve and achieve relevance, and expand on counseling efforts where strategies to enhance the sense of control yielded encouraging results (Young, 1986). In communities where policy-makers regularly confront dramatic lifestyle concerns, timely research has an important role in the development of systematic applications.

Conditions of Ambiguity

As companies alter their structure through cutbacks and layoffs, workers and other community members are in a position to develop meaningful and successful strategies to accommodate to changes. However, economic transition sets the stage for community unrest (Schiller, 1984) and disruption in families (Johnson, 1979). In other words, communities have not dealt with economic change in a purposeful or systematic way. Typically, there was little information or support provided by corporations (Gordus, Jarley & Ferman, 1981) to alleviate the

impending hardship for workers and their families. Local community sources of information often lacked applicability to personal and family circumstances (Moran & Sawyers, 1986). These conditions may set the stage for ambiguity and rumors to gain credibility within communities. In this way, economic disadvantage (Moen, Kain & Elder, 1983; Voydanoff, 1983) compounds relational tension, i.e., solutions and support are difficult to access.

In addition, communities were slow to develop policy and resources to benefit workers and their families during periods of employment transition (Axinn & Stern, 1988). Often, community leaders were not aware of the plight of many families (Schiller, 1984). Therefore, the demands on couples arising from current information and resource deficits exacerbated their failure to develop timely decisions. Community neglect compounded their relational discomfort. Also, it likely prolonged their vulnerability to the rigors of financial reduction and underemployment. The longer ambiguity was experienced, the greater the probability couples experienced diminished or altered perceptions of control.

The maintenance of autonomy has importance for married men. Autonomy, as often perceived, is a fertile arena for the use of passive coping, and may often be predicted by internality. A heightened expression of internality, without sharing, may precede loneliness and isolation. This posture and extreme externality sets the stage for depression

(Kirchler, 1983). Therefore, maintenance of autonomy may call for variety and flexibility in relationships with other people rather than stereo-typed or elevated responses. Promotion of either strategy, without consideration for the context and personal needs of individuals, may invite undesirable outcomes. Dramatic, new approaches to provide healthy community resources are called for to reduce dependence on external sources for personal adjustment (Axinn & Stern, 1988), and traditional models for marital decisions.

Survey Method

A Northwest community displayed high levels of unemployment, substantial plant closure, cutbacks, layoffs, and limited population movement. The county was thought "typical" in economic development and population characteristics for the state. The sample was selected from a telephone book using accepted random selection methods. Project investigators delivered questionnaires to 162 volunteer couples following a telephone screening procedure, using marital status, labor force participation, and volunteerism as criteria. The surveys for 149 of them were returned. Of these, 12 were not used because respondents were retired or cohabitating despite screening efforts, or the questionnaire was insufficiently filled out for analysis. When an investigator arrived at the household, the purpose of the study, confidentiality, and the voluntary nature of participation was reviewed. Additional questions were

answered and a contact procedure was provided. Respondents received thank you letters and preliminary results of the study through a brief newsletter which outlined the more descriptive findings. They, also, were included in a cash, lotto-style drawing.

Sample

Demographic data regarding the total sample (N=274 husbands and wives) provided information regarding the community lifestyle. The sample was predominantly caucasian, only five couples indicating another ethnic group. Most of the participants (82.3%) reported living within the non-metropolitan community for an extended period of time (16.2 years). Their average age was 40.1 years. The average length of marriage was 15.0 years, and few were married more than one time. Sixty-four respondents completed high school (23%), thirty-seven (14%) reported the highest level of educational experience to be technical or trade school, ninety-one (33%) attended college, while nineteen (7%) completed college. Forty-one (15%) completed post-university training, while twenty-one (8%) did not complete high school. Husbands reported full-time work at one job as the dominant form of employment (69.1%), eighteen (17.6%) were self-employed, two (2.2%) were full-time farmers/ranchers, and five (5.1%) were working at more than one job. There were few alternative lifestyles, i.e., students, or househusbands reported.

Therefore, the length of marriage and distribution of age was not remarkable compared to national norms. Couples were moderately well-educated, with few who were not high school graduates, and many who participated in some post-high school training. Nearly 75% were employed at full-time or at more than one job. Since 5% reported unemployment, the remaining 20% were assumed working at less than a full-time level. Therefore, at least 25% of these men experienced some type of underemployment.

The sample was divided according to income reduction and gender. Husbands were selected for this study because of the long tradition of the breadwinner role in the local area, and its emphasis within the literature reviewed. The underemployed group was composed of those men who experienced an income reduction in the last year of 30% or more. This was accomplished by creating a dummy variable through subtracting current income from income of the year prior and dividing this numerator by 100. It also included those with a current income of $10,000 or less. These individual men share the employment characteristics of few work hours and low income (Guss, 1988). There was some disagreement about the amount of financial reduction involved in marital vulnerability during economic transition. The 30% criteria was chosen because it seemed the more severe, i.e., in dollar amount this reduction is substantial even for those with high salaries, yet allowed

for adequate numbers within cells. Also, the 30% limit is implicated in marital instability (Moen, 1979).

Instruments

Levenson (1973) developed an instrument which distinguished between internal and external locus of control, and determined whether externality was oriented toward powerful persons or the domain of chance phenomena, a consideration in fatalism. This control construct was validated, in part, by how well it related to the amount of information sought in a hospital setting by patients. The rationale is that people who are internally oriented attempt to control their environment through knowledge (Lefcourt, 1984). Thus, externality toward other people can be distinguished from the more fatalistic orientation to chance.

Marital satisfaction is examined through the Dyadic Adjustment Scale (DAS). Spanier (1976) reported content validity based on judgements of experts relating theoretical dimensions to the subscales of the instrument. It, also, was found to discriminate between married and divorced samples, providing some grounds for known-groups validity. In support of Spanier's original study, Spanier and Thompson (1982) found the DAS had construct validity by conforming to theory (Filsinger, 1983). The subscales for Consensus and Cohesion were used to assess agreement in marital decision-making and the manner of support gained through shared activities in the marriage (Spanier, 1976).

Results

The results of this analysis highlighted associations. However, there was some data from the demographic attitudinal measures which were relevant. The lack of significant differentiation among those variables (Table I) invites three conclusions. One, hardship potentially can be a factor in anyone's life. The lack of significance on the education level and age variables indicated that the number of years of education and maturity of the worker provide limited protection from financial disadvantage. Also, hardship may have normative features particularly during contemporary times.

Second, there was no significant difference between groups regarding home ownership or time spent in the community. While there are a number of benefits for remaining in a community and developing roots (Caplovitz, 1979), during periods of financial reduction such links to the community may be more of an anchor and contribute to dissatisfaction (Guss, 1988). Residential ties often eliminate or unfavorably weight the alternative of geographic mobility. Or, the proportion of income utilized for house payments limits options for meeting daily needs.

Third, employment status of the two groups was instructive. Only about 5% of both groups were unemployed. In fact, about the same proportion of workers were in the categories of employed, part-time work, or unemployed.

Therefore, the hardship of financial loss complements employment status. Those who experienced substantial income reduction were likely fully employed. Also, about the same number of sources for income was utilized by all husbands, but much more variety was demonstrated by the non-hardship group (Guss, 1988). It is not surprising, then, for financial attitudes of those in hardship to waiver between satisfaction and dissatisfaction depending on income demands (Figure I). One visualizes the gradual erosion of resources and increased sense of ambiguity and heightened levels of tension among these men.

The associations (Table II) among personal and marital variables provided information useful in rethinking the perspective on locus of control. First, the subscales of locus of control were significantly different from each other. Internality, powerful others, and chance were likely measuring different phenomena. Therefore, the sense of control may be a perception experienced as high to low relative to self or environmental events (Tiffany, 1965). Second, the marital variables included (consensus and cohesion) were associated with external expressions of locus of control (powerful others and chance), and not internality. Again, reconceptualization of locus of control seems appropriate to account for what appears to be marital contextual influence(s). Other variables included in the analysis did not yield meaningful results.

Discussion

This report portrays financial loss as a marital problem in establishing desired degree(s) of control. The resource development approach appeared to address only part of the problem. It emphasized individual development while neglecting marital decision making. It assumes individuals increase their education, make career changes, or take on more work in response to financial loss. However the number of resources available was less important to control and adjustment than how they were used by couples (Zvonkovic, Guss & Ladd, 1988).

Research often focused on personal characteristics and implicated health deficiencies (Kasl & Cobb, 1977), vulnerability to mental health problems, (Brenner, 1973; Tiffany, Cowan & Tiffany, 1970), and depression and passivity (Abraham & Sackheim, 1977). In these circumstances, inadequate preparation in marriage for stressor events (Spanier and Lewis, 1980), counter-productive efforts at re-employment (Gordus, Jarley & Ferman, 1981), and spousal differences in perception during employment change (Voydanoff & Donnelly, 1985) had substantial disruptive affects. Such conditions are likely, then, to precede diminished martial quality and reflect community needs. Therefore, failure to adjust may indicate group deficiency as much as personal inadequacy. This indicates a multidimensional approach to

intervention with individuals may be effective. Therefore, providing opportunities for people in communities to work together in novel ways may elicit mutual trust, and avoid exploitive practices.

The blending of individual qualities and characteristics of marital interaction during hard times provides a substantial challenge to the resources within communities. There are, also, complex lifestyle issues which may hinder effective intervention. A useful framework for the discussion of the systemic overlap of these concerns from a developmental perspective is provided by Brehm (1983). It outlines four continua along which individuals develop personal orientations throughout the lifespan: Trust vs oppression: commitment vs. possessiveness; friends vs lovers; and self-sufficiency vs. not caring. These developmental challenges are utilized here to clarify these research results. This may be useful to those providing guidelines for family intervention, formulating community policy, and planning career development programs. In other words, the discussion is directed at clarifying the systemic relationships between the individual and the community and provide a rationale for realigning mesosystemic (i.e., family, neighborhood, school, kin group) linkages (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

Trust vs Oppression

The value in providing additional opportunities for married men allows them to experience their communities in different ways. (It is important for people in hardship, males in this instance, to experience community acknowledgement of strain. Perception becomes a shared experience. The goals of this strategy are to: remove financial hardship from the "closet"; and effect change among workers in their perspective on work. Specific activities for implementation are:

* Distribute existing materials on career development, parenting, and marital communication at public events (Particularly those which are heavily attended by men) and among civic groups.

* Advocate for the removal of proposed political/legal barriers to bartering activities and cash reimbursement, and development of skills exchange networks.

* Include home improvement information in marital and parenting workshops with an emphasis on enhancement of valuation and assessment.

* Provide income maintenance strategies in newspaper stories about survivors of hard times.

Commitment vs. Possessiveness

The results reported here implicate the amount and type

of interaction which occurs between spouses. For these husbands, the cost of including others may be too high. This perception assumes sharing involves a loss of identity. Therefore, during hard times, they experience the full force of disadvantage with little support. A useful program which may reduce vulnerability by providing a means to alter their perspective regarding relationships, the role of husband, and interpersonal conflict. The initiation and maintenance of male support groups within communities is likely to be an effective platform for these special topics. A few which relate to connections with others and personal responsibility include:

* Defining conflict as acceptable marital behavior;
* Learning and practicing rules for fighting fair;
* Providing information about alternative lifestyles;
* Understanding that conflicts exist in several forms and require different strategies.

Friends vs. Lovers

Many men understand demonstrations of affection as unidimensional. It is a significant relationship hurdle, particularly among traditional males. They may be tempted to sexualize expressions of caring which impedes the development of enriching relationships. To the degree these descriptions are true, a number of issues related to affection and sexuality within a marriage remain underdeveloped for them. The results of this analysis indicate married men may view a variety of activities personally threatening and/or sexually

solicitous. As such, they are socially restricted to the marriage or concerned with inviting intimacy with a non-spouse. To address this phenomenon, the primary objective is to engage (underemployed) married men in volunteer activities. In most communities, there is an abundance of work which is not occupationally organized, contributes to the success of community groups, and enhances the well-being of participants. Volunteerism for hardpressed men may develop new perspectives when:

* Recruitment stimulates an awareness of potentially worthwhile skills;
* Relational topics which arise are processed in regularly scheduled ad hoc groups.
* Activities allow participants to become aware of different feelings associated with new relationships.

Self-Sufficiency vs. Not Caring

Many men invest much of their identity in their jobs. Even though underemployment is temporary, the outcomes of adjustment strategies may become personalized. The worker is likely to experience underemployment and unsuccessful re-employment as failure. It seems tempting, then, to view other family members who work to meet their own needs or contribute to family income, as taking something away from the provider or diminishing the control in his life. This data suggests married men can enhance their adjustment to hard times by distinguishing conceptually what they can control from phenomena outside their influence or where control is limited.

The following topics relate to this troublesome perspective in career development, and seem amenable to education and media presentations, support group or personal counseling sessions.

* It is important to have working capital to meet daily expenses. The ability to pay for personal needs maintains self-esteem. Therefore, underemployed husbands can earn money each day to meet this objective whether it involves picking up cans and bottles or a daily paper route. The important issue is the availability of cash not the exercise of occupational ability.

* Defining the salary of other family members as family income contributes to their own growth and development as well as the identity of the underemployed husband. The ability to allow others to contribute in a meaningful way is being developmentally responsive to family needs.

The purpose of this discussion is to outline a systematic perspective for intervention and clarify the implications for marital relations and community lifestyles. While underemployment has personal consequences (Guss, 1988), hardship is an important issue for marriages and families (Conger, Elder, Lorenz, Conger, Simons, Whitbeck, Huck & Melby, 1990). Strategies which enhance the sense of control among those hard-hit by financial reduction appear to be a promising direction for community-based programs. Such an approach may provide a means for underemployed husbands to alter their relational perspectives and facilitate marital stability (Zvonkovic, Guss & Ladd, 1988). The implications for larger systems are substantial. The suggestions included in this paper are intended to elicit modifications in lifestyles within communities, and demonstrate a basis for

individuals to forge new relationships, reduce tension among couples, and provide a method for community members to share their considerable resources and commitment.

FIGURE I

FINANCIAL SATISFACTION
(Indecisive-Ambivalent)

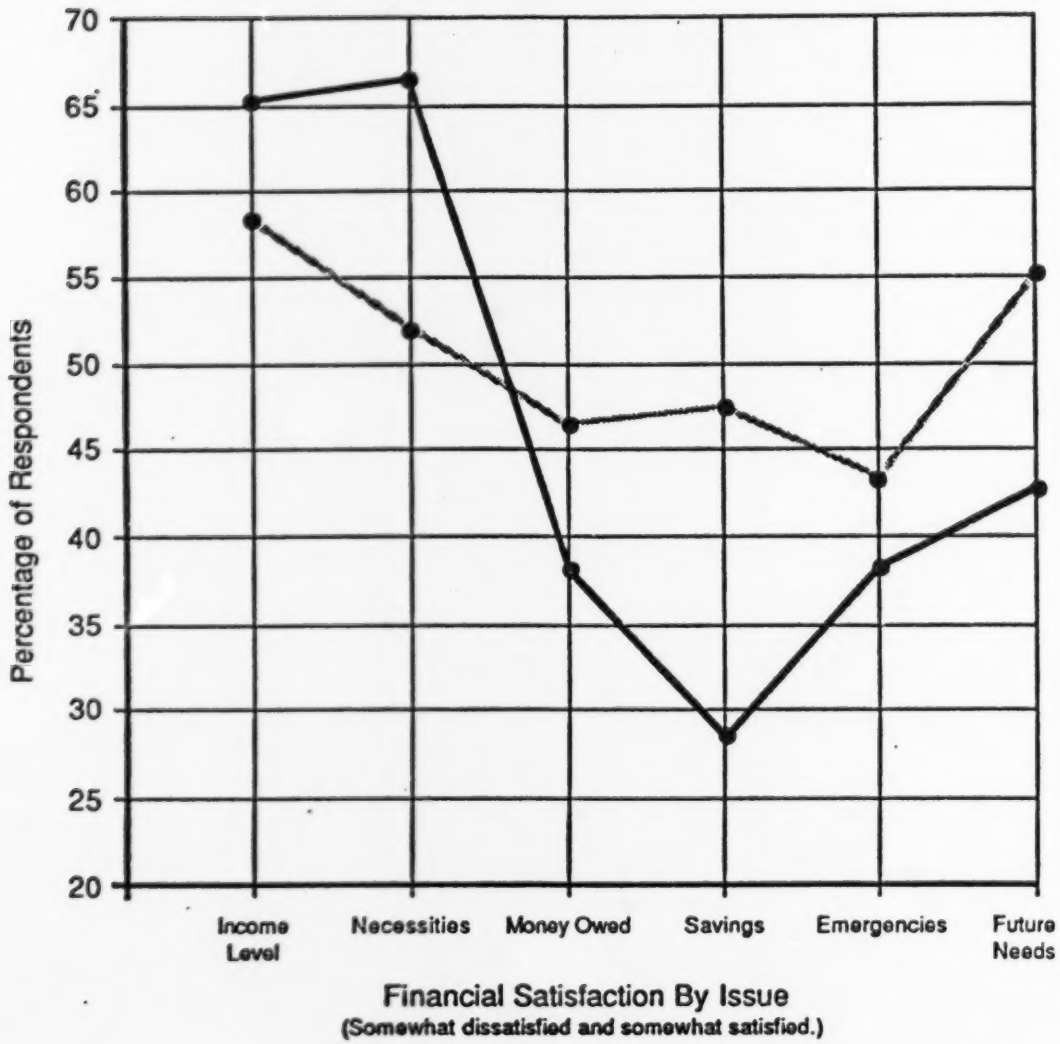

TABLE I
DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS
By Group Assignment

Characteristic	Hardship	Non-Hardship
Length of Marriage	15.0 yrs	15.2 yrs
Number of Children	1.5	2.6
Age	38.9 yrs	40.3 yrs
Time in Community	17.0 yrs	16.9 yrs
Residence:		
Ownership	71.4%	72.4%
Renting	28.6%	24.1%
Education Level:		
< High School	33%	25%
Some College + Grad. College + Some Prof.	25%	63%
Completed Sequence	43%	54%
Noncompleted Sequence	57%	48%
Employment:		
Full-time	90%	94%
Part-time	9%	10%
Unemployed	4.7%	5.2%

$p > .05$

TABLE II

PEARSON CORRELATIONS
By Marital & Individual Qualities

	Cons	Coh	FOSS	Int.	Others	Chan.	ATW
Consensus		*** .5436	.1207	.0903	** -.2231	** -.2273	.0725
Cohesion			-.0049	-.0537	** -.2702	* -.2223	.1742
Fear of Success				.0575	.0678	.1460	.0750
Intern-ality					** -.2677	*** -.4573	.0529
Powerful Others						*** .6686	-.1486
Chance Control							.0360
Attitude Toward Women							

* p < .05
** p < .01
*** p < .001

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